



ELSAH HISTORY

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A lithograph by Rudolph Tandler showing the corner of Elm and LaSalle streets in the 1930's with children sledding. Note that a car has pulled up to the Spatz filling station. (Recently the Maybeck Gallery; now the permanent home of Historic Elshah Foundation.)

RUDOLPH TANDLER, ELSAH ARTIST

by Charles B. Hosmer

When *Elsah History* devoted an issue to the artists now recording our village, several readers commented that we should devote some space to the work of Rudolph Tandler, who moved here in 1935 and worked here until his passing in 1940. In gathering information on Tandler's career we have been assisted by his daughter, Mrs. Verna Herbert of St. Louis. Through Mrs. Herbert's generosity we are able to see what the Village Inn looked like in the late 1930's when the Tandler family had decorated the building both inside and out.

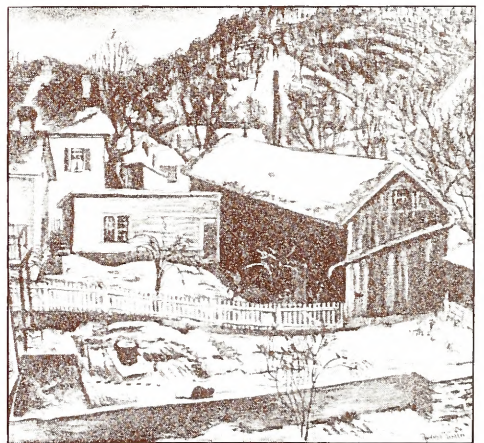
There is ample justification for including Rudolph Tandler in our study of Elsay artists, because he produced two very popular prints of the village. One of these pictures shows the corner of La Salle and Elm streets in the winter with children sledding down the hill next to the Village Inn. The other print shows "Father Christmas" looking down over Elsay with the newly-completed college chapel up in one corner. This view has been used as a Christmas card a number of times. We also offer some oil paintings of the town done during the period the Tandlers lived in the Inn. One of the most interesting of this group is titled "Backyards in Elsay." It was probably painted from the back porch of the Inn, looking toward the Keller barn. Even today we can see practically the same view when the staff of Elsay Landing is not using the parking area behind the restaurant.

Rudolph Tandler's work reminds us of an Elsay that was still cut off from the casual Sunday driver. It was a much quieter place whose main connection with the outside world was the Dinky coming up-river from Alton. Today there is a Tandler painting of the arrival of this school-bus-on-rails in the Alumni Guest House at Principia College. As a member of the college art department, he was quick to enjoy the beauty of our village and its surroundings. The river, the bluffs, and the college chapel figured in his works from the later 1930's.

When Tandler came to work for Principia College in St. Louis in 1932 he was already an experienced artist. He had studied at the Chicago Art Institute and then worked in New York as a magazine illustrator. He also was a resident of the Woodstock, N.Y., art colony and studied with some of the most influential art teachers in America, including Robert Henri and George Bellows. He lived for a while in Utica, N.Y., and then established himself in Greenwich Village as a practicing artist. While he taught at Principia, Tandler exhibited his works in art shows, and he received favorable comments on his



A Tandler Christmas Card - 1939, featuring the former Keller - Lazenby House.



Backyards in Elsay - a lithograph by Rudolph Tandler.

This view was painted from the second floor of the Village Inn (now the Bradley home), looking toward the Keller barn.



Mrs. Tandler and her daughter Gladys in the Dining room of the Village Inn following the renovation of the interior by the Tandlers.



Elsah Flour Mill - a lithograph by Rudolph Tandler.



A 1936 Tandler Christmas card (lithograph) with Father Christmas looking down over Elsie in the snow. La Salle Street occupies the front of the picture, beginning with the Union Hotel on the McDow property, and ending on the right with the Village Inn. In the foreground are the Spatz filling station and the Bible House. The winding road on the right is of course the trail leading up to the Principia College Chapel, past the site of the present Voney Art Studio.

paintings, lithographs and drawings. In 1931 he won a Gold Medal at the Detroit Institute of Arts. During one of the summers he taught at Principia, he attended a course on wet-wash watercolor in Vermont. It was a technique he had not tried before, and he found the Vermont countryside a perfect subject for his new-found skill.

In spite of the Depression, he was able to send his two daughters to Principia, and this connection led to his employment with the college. The first student newspaper at Elsie, called the *Elsie Bluff*, carried a tribute from his male colleagues to Tandler in November of 1940:

There is not a man of us who, since you have lived and worked beside us, has not learned, at least a little, to see more beauty around him, to find more joy and adventure just in living, and who has not caught a spark of that fine courage which goes through the valley of the shadow with head up and face shining.

In November of 1939 a reporter from the *Alton Telegraph* interviewed Rudolph Tandler on his life as an artist, and the article brought forth his views on Elsie as a possible cultural center. Perhaps we should leave the last word to the painter in this case. Do we share his hopes for Elsie?

I can imagine a naturally beautiful village like Elsie becoming a center for creative artists, painters, sculptors, craftsmen in metal, textile and leather, and musicians and writers, too. With its old-world atmosphere, its rugged bluffs, wooded valleys, and above all its picturesque river, what a haven it would be for those who depend on inspiration for the accomplishment of their work!

Here people might come to paint and draw, to engage in the making of or the purchase of craft-work. Here musicians could give Sunday concerts, and writers might give readings of their works, as they do in some of the art colonies in the East. There is no end to the delightful possibilities which might develop in such a community to enrich the cultural life of the entire vicinity.



Rudolph Tandler at work on a self-portrait.



Rudolph Tandler at work on a painting of the Principia College Chapel. This work is now in the faculty dining room on the campus. (Photo courtesy The Principia)



Paul Barnes

by Paul Williams

Everyone in Elsay knew Paul Barnes. As the longtime Postmaster, he stood at the hub of the one true center the small village society has. He always greeted people coming to the Post Office with gentle courtesy and friendly conversation. He often went out of his way to accommodate those whose messages and packages passed through his hands.

But Paul Barnes was much more than a Postmaster. He was a lifelong village resident who regularly contributed to every aspect of the small society of Elsay.

His great-grandfather had been a minister in the Elsay Methodist Church in the days when the pay was so small that he had to hunt for the family pot with an old muzzle-loader. Paul once recalled to me how his grandfather used paper hornets' nests for wadding rather than manufactured paper, and having tested the packing properties of hornet-produced paper, I can attest to its superior quality for such a purpose.

Paul's father was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident before he was born, and so he was raised by his grandparents, Richard and Nora Barnes.

Pictures of Elsay school children in the late 1920's and early '30's always include Paul, whose contemplative nature and courtesy were already marked when he was a boy.

Following his years in the Elsay school, Paul went to high school in Alton, and after his graduation worked for the Shell Oil Company until he became assistant to Elsay Postmistress, Alice Condit, taking over the position of Postmaster upon her retirement.

Paul served on the Elsay Village Board, and when his job as Postmaster prevented him from running for the Board any longer, he came regularly to the Board meetings and added his wisdom and commentary to the proceedings.

When the Quarry-Elsay Fire Protection District was being formed, Paul Barnes was one of the central citizens doing the work of formation. He became Elsay's first Fire Chief, serving in that office for many years until his



retirement in 1984. This significant contribution to his community, like the work of all volunteer firefighters, went largely unrecognized, but it involved daily attention in being certain that the fire phone was covered by someone all the time, as well as in managing all aspects of the Elsay fire protection operation. Many times Paul and his wife, Alma, who served as Chief Dispatcher, stayed home on weekends and evenings to be near the fire phone when no one else was available, even though Paul's duties as Chief went much beyond the demanding work of coordinating phone coverage.

Paul regularly organized the annual fall Fish Fry put on by the firemen to raise money for a Christmas party for the Elsay area children, and organized the Christmas party as well. I recall well the evening each year when the fire-fighters would meet at the Barnes' to bag the candy, peanuts, and oranges to be given to the children. It was always a pleasant time, and the bagging was always followed by refreshments, as the Barnes' dog, Ladybug, nosed among the guests.

Paul served for many years also as Santa Claus at the party, riding down Mill Street to the Civic Center on top of the fire truck, with the siren shrilling and searchlights all on him, his face wholly shrouded in white whiskers. On one well remembered occasion, a sycamore tree

reached out a branch and plucked off his hat and wig nearly in view of the multitude of children peering from the windows of the Civic Center.

Paul also organized the annual firefighters' dinner and supervised many fire scenes in his white Chief's coat. Organization, maintenance, attendance at trustees' and firefighters' meetings made Chief Barnes' work extensive and time-consuming. It was a tiger he rode for many years.

Since the firefighters sponsor the local Boy Scout troop, Paul also served for years on the district Scout board, with all its numerous duties.

At the time that annexation of additional area into the

village came up, Paul worked gathering information and signatures for that purpose as a volunteer, and his work undergirded the annexation which eventually occurred.

Contributions to the organization and work of Historic Elsie Foundation by both Paul and Alma Barnes have helped the organization greatly since its formation. Paul was a storehouse of information about Elsie, and he gladly related what he knew.

Service and dedication are necessary marks of the contributing citizen of a small town. In Paul Barnes these qualities, coupled with steady, hard work, made him a touchstone of the type of person from which communities derive their strength.



Looking across Mississippi Street from the dinky tracks between 1935 and 1940. On the left is the back corner of Riverview House. The Bible House shows dimly in the trees next to the stone building that became the doll museum. Below this house is a steam roller, and right above it appears the Apocrypha and the newly-completed Spatz filling station (now the Maybeck Gallery). The Bates-Lanigan house appears in the distance next to the Village Inn. In the foreground is the foundation of a large barn that had been on Elm Street in the nineteenth century. To the right of the Village Inn one can see sheds (many have disappeared) and wooden houses along Mill Street. The Darr house is on the far right.

This view was taken from the Village Inn looking toward the river across Elm Street. Wood from the old barn seems to be tacked on the corner on the site of the present Trovillion house. The little stone building with the porch was later to become the doll museum. Then, slightly to the left comes the back of Riverview House and the dim form of the Odd Fellows Hall backing up to the dinky tracks. (Both photos from the Tandler collection)

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